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Research Article

Geopolitical Competition and Strategic Shifts in South Asia: Analysing the Indo-Pacific Strategy

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Abstract

The paper argues that the reconceptualisation of a new geopolitical construct in Indo-Pacific strategy, within a global context, is shifting back to traditional alignments and realigning the regional security architecture, as well as economic pathways through South Asia. However, from a broader perspective, what has implications for the argument is the way these three power brokers are forcing countries everywhere to respond to their recasting of the global order. This paper, building on academic literature and the neoclassical realism framework, demonstrates through a qualitative study that South Asia has evolved into a significant region, rather than just another theatre. The study results suggest a shift in India's multi-alignment strategy from reactive to proactive, which seeks to safeguard national interests amid the great power competition in a pragmatic manner. This is further complicated by India's geopolitical ambitions, which come into conflict with its careful, often suspicion-laden, trade practices. The rise of minilateral forums, such as the Quad, also underscores a strategic realignment. The paper concludes that the region's future is defined, in part, by how these nations handle this delicate mix of collaboration, competition, and strategic autonomy.

Keywords: Geopolitical Competition, India, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Multi-alignment, Quad, South Asian politics, Strategic autonomy

Introduction

The worldwide power play and change, or turmoil, in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean regions are unfolding at light speed, with two enormous global powers converging their actions virtually every time: the USA and China, thus nudging aspirations to rise themselves among the central nodes in the international political lexicon. This abstract history in the broad maritime space appears to be reshaping traditional geopolitics and altering the security architecture and economic corridors at the very core of regional South Asia (Kumar et al., 2020, pp. 215-220).

The Indo-Pacific construct recognises the Indian Ocean as a global hub, central to international power politics, where rising powers like India are strategically located to leverage geoeconomic changes and protect their national interests. The epicentres of geo-economic and geo-strategic competition are gradually shifting from Europe to Asia, specifically seen as one of the global power regions by its Indo-Pacific regional prism. High politics of intensified great power rivalry, especially between the US, China and India in trying to outmanoeuvre each other in order to exercise influence and control over this enormous maritime

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space, carries numerous implications/applications for regional stability as well as emergent foreign policy decisions of South Asian littorals (Hayat et al., 2020, pp. 65–74).

It is essential to examine how these broad Indo-Pacific strategies intersect with the diverse political choices of South Asian countries to analyse contemporary international relations. The Indo-Pacific strategy implications for the political landscape in South Asia: A paper jointly published by ORF and KCL on understanding what the greater sense of the Indo-Pacific would mean for a changing geopolitical matrix, including the possibilities that such an entails, as well as challenges. Assessing the necessity for altering diplomatic positions of countries such as India, Japan, the US, and Australia, majorly catalysed by a need to counterbalance China and perpetuate maritime engagements (Baitha & Chatterjee, 2022, pp. 21-41).

India is expanding its range these days in counterbalancing China's "String of Pearls" with a "Necklace of Diamonds", marking an upswing in the assertive geo-strategic contestation across Asia, as evident and radiated by the likes of Sri Lanka's latest gambits. It has also facilitated the return and projection of traditional security fears, and with it, a call for reduced hierarchical relationships in diplomatic and security engagement between states, including some hitherto non-aligned countries.

The rubric of security architectures meeting economic imperatives, arguably the essence of globalisation, is challenged by these actors through new regional polemics. This challenges South Asian states to act or react differently to the increasingly dynamic geopolitical arena and an often-revisited set of traditional foreign policy façades. The intensified competition has resulted in considerable shifts of power, such as the US maintaining its preeminent regional position, utilising naval facilities and relationships with littoral partners, notably India, which also tries to balance against China's rising influence. This is also evident in the creation of quasi-alliances, such as the negotiation of diplomatic and military coordination among the UK, Japan, Australia, and India in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, aimed at counterbalancing Chinese regional influence (Kliem, 2020, pp. 271–304).

Significance of the Paper

This paper argues that the Indo-Pacific strategy, as a purportedly "free and open" regional order-building endeavour, implicitly redefines prevailing role-based security logics in the region, presenting South Asian states with problematic decisions concerning their strategic autonomy and economic development path. It will also examine how regional actors, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, respond to these dynamics through non-alignment or by creating their own rules of the game to insulate themselves from major power rivalries.

The paper analysed China's response through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to the rising involvement in countries such as Nepal, along with an expanded Indo-Pacific strategic perspective, which Beijing has been accused of furthering regional control. Other interpretations offer prospects for growth, given China's deepening economic footprint in areas such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, albeit with concerns about debt sustainability and strategic leverage.

Literature Review

This changing geostrategic reality has necessitated a revision of our understanding of traditional geopolitical theories and a deeper exploration of the levers through which global and regional powers can effect change. As a result, discussions in academia have shifted nearly entirely to the notion of strategic autonomy and its implications for Indian foreign policy in this complex environment. This concept is fundamental to understanding how countries such as India manage the deepening great power contest, on the

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one hand, between the USA and China, while maintaining their decision autonomy intact (Muraviev et al., 2021, pp. 1119–1138).

India, which, for example, practices a kind of 'polyalignment' by engaging with many different global actors, also when it comes to infrastructure and technology, has been shaped in its policy-making processes by the fragmentation under Modi and the interplay of government and domestic economic factions (Magunna, 2025, pp. 1-19). In this pragmatic mode, India addresses its security dilemmas by engaging with significant powers, either through alignment or hedging against a potential adversary (Muraviev et al., 2021, pp. 1119–1138). This carefully crafted approach enables India to balance various national interests related to economic prosperity, security, and status within a multi-polar global system. These associations resonate with scholarly discussions that identify Indian Foreign Policy as "Multi-alignment", "Strategic Autonomy" or hedge, reflecting its attempts to minimise exposure and visibility, support risk viability in the regional multilateral institutions and strategic partners (Kara, 2025, pp. 5-36).

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research method, involving an in-depth examination of academic literature, policy documents, and expert opinions, to elucidate Indo-Pacific strategies and their political implications in South Asia. Building on different philosophies, such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism, the book explores the implications of this new geopolitical context for how states are likely to behave and why. This examination will provide a critical analysis of India's multi-alignment management strategies and its relations with regional bodies, such as SAARC and BIMSTEC, suggesting how these engagements underpin aspects of India's broader Indo-Pacific strategic posture.

The method used will be to determine whether an "geopolitical global trading power" such as India, with high growth rates and a multi-alignment strategy, might unwittingly counter its ambition through a "disengaging trade policy". All of this enables a more nuanced foreign policy that can help navigate the tumultuous geopolitical waters India is widely perceived to be navigating, as New Delhi aims to advance its national interests and strategic partnerships in concurrence with its significant role on the non-aligned map.

This strategy enables India to conduct economic diplomacy and security cooperation as geopolitical tools, extending its regional influence, at the very least, where it can provide the driving force behind groups such as BIMSTEC due to a lack of traditional adversaries. In response, India has initiated moves to rev up sub-regional connectivity initiatives, such as BBIN (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal) and BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), to weave deeper economic and strategic ties with its immediate vicinity.

Research Gaps

A substantial amount of literature is available on Indian foreign policy and the broader strategic landscape in the Indo-Pacific. However, there is little research on the detrimental impact that closed trade has on India's geopolitical objectives or its political standing within South Asia, as well as increasingly across the broader Indo-Pacific region. India wants to play a Global role on one hand, yet is deeply opposed to open-trade policies on the other. This, allegedly due to a lack of competitiveness within Indian industries and discomfort with new-generation trade issues, is another dichotomy that deserves a deeper probe into its long-term strategic significance.

The gap also extends to how India's new Free Trade Agreement strategy, including its refusal to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), helps or hinders these strategic objectives and

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the building of regional economic architecture. This paper aims to fill this gap by meticulously re-examining India's long and complex trade policy journey, as well as its implications for the crucial question of power projection and strategic intent realisation in the Indo-Pacific formation.

Theoretical Framework

The paper analyses the Indo-Pacific strategy, particularly its implications for South Asia, through theoretical lenses, primarily neoclassical realism for explaining state behaviour in an anarchic international system, supplemented by institutionalism to explain the role of regional bodies. The framework thus enables the investigation of how India's domestic political structures, economic capabilities, and broader security influence combine to determine India's strategic choices in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment, particularly for its interactions with major global powers and neighbours (Khatoon, 2022, pp. 9-13).

The framework also includes an investigation of how India's internal problems, including sluggish macroeconomic growth and high fiscal deficits, weaken its power projection capabilities and regional strategic scenario (Dai, 2013, pp. 771-780). On a broader level, it is in how India applies its foreign policy that it takes into account changes within our politics and the international environment as a whole. More specifically, the analysis will review directives in India's foreign policy that should be addressed to illuminate indian social and political beliefs and theories of actors as shown by some scholars (Hall, 2025, pp. 61-74).

Results

This section presents the findings of interviews with scholars and analysts, revealing that India's transition from non-alignment to multi-alignment under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure was motivated by its ambitions for regional and global dominance. This is when India shifts gears to leverage its economic and military clout through a strategic pivot that could change its relative competitive fortune in the world. One such attempt has taken the form of making economic growth a key component of its foreign policy and opening up opportunities domestically by maintaining preparations externally (Kukreja, 2020, pp. 8–23).

India's Strategic and Economic Posture

Transformation has been the language of the Modi years. Indeed, in the trade policy area, as well as at least in terms of the policy priorities and exercise for negotiations, India has broadly stayed on the same course (temporary diversion to still more extreme positions) which we outlined earlier. It also echoes a standard recommendation in Chinese policy literature, which argues that specific trade policies are politically and domestically unsustainable in China (even if Chinese rhetoric says otherwise) but does so alongside broader points about balancing domestic economic needs with outward foreign policy priorities: how this tension plays out is an area for future research. India's wariness stems from the trade policies it has employed, ranging from pre-colonial export substitution to post-independence import substitution. Finally, the openness-inducing liberalisation of the 1990s is more than enough evidence to suggest a reinvigorated India engaging with global trade regimes. Additionally, there is a reevaluation of India's historical non-alignment, a key aspect of its foreign policy since independence.

This balance is somewhat referred to as less mainstream but more acute in the backgrounds of current strategic optioning, albeit with a gradient towards Western cultural and civilizational solutions. This shift from non-alignment and apparent convergence with Western norms, in many ways, has led to an

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"unlike-others" kind of engagement by India towards the Indo-Pacific construct within its broader strategic and regional partnerships. While India's foreign policy has indeed accommodated economic diplomacy as an essential factor, its historical antipathy to extensive trade liberalisation, especially in multilateral regimes such as the WTO, continues to confine its strategic autonomy (Narlikar, 2021, pp. 148–166).

This assertion is also complicated by the long shadow of Indian strategic culture, which, although it has been transforming its foreign and security policies, still shows enduring elements that affect its behaviour towards global economic structures (Paranjpe, 2020). Nonetheless, such inherent caution does not prevent India from tactically focusing on economic partnerships that serve its more immediate strategic interests, even if this takes the form of a bilateral pact rather than a wide-ranging multilateral deal. This selective engagement is a manifestation of the Indian strategy of hedging, aimed at expanding its strategic space through multi-alignment and non-entanglement (Kara, 2025, pp. 5–36).

Pragmatism has helped India reconcile its economic ambitions with its strategic anxieties, particularly in navigating relations with major powers and regional rivals. Secondly, India's strategic culture articulates self-reliance via a historical prism (read Kautilya's Arthashastra), with idealistic notions of national interest, which underscores hesitancy around international commitments and a bias towards bilateral rather than multilateral platforms.

This backdrop of history and culture informs the extent to which India is willing to embrace further economic collaboration. In turn, that calculation bears on its grander Indo-Pacific blueprint. This has enabled India to navigate the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical quagmire, free from external constraints, and to find a balance between its aspirations for regional dominance and its strategic autonomy.

Discussion

The Contradiction of Pragmatism: Trade Policy and Strategic Aspirations

This apparent contradiction in India's foreign policy today —a very assertive face as a player with geopolitical aspirations at the top table of global politics and an economically protectionist, if not autarkic one —is probably one of the most prominent features. Despite a cacophony of voices, it may be more noise than music as of now regarding global engagements and "multi-aligned" policy, India has remained largely faithful to its age-old trade policy of procrastination. The most critical component of its Indo-Pacific strategy is this unbroken form, even as the country seeks to expand its strategic reach. This seeming contradiction is reflective not of incoherence but rather the entrenched domestic economic interests and strategic reservations about full trade liberalisation.

The persistence of these factors includes strong domestic lobbying efforts in several sectors and worries about soaring trade deficits, notably with China. As Blarel (2025) has noted, the pluralism of Indian politics, with its diverse array of actors and varied foreign policy orientations, has a significant impact on how India operates globally, thereby creating potential points of tension between domestic considerations and external interests. Such a weak-kneed trade policy, in turn, hampers Indian efforts to create a strong economic partnership with other countries, something that can become an important counterbalance to the increasingly influential China in this part of the world.

The Strategic Progression of A Policy

The Indo-Pacific strategies of India diverged from its 'Act East' policy, formulated in the beginning as a "Look East" Policy, by the early 1990s, aimed at restoring connectivity with Southeast Asia via economic and diplomatic means, which originated more broadly on solid inter-regional strategic grounds.

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However, that policy has since been rebranded to serve the strategic impulse of a greater India in an expanded Indo-Pacific framework, and the geopolitical seamwork on which it hinges remains as important, if not more so, than those economic considerations (Bajpaee, 2022, pp. 631–661).

This evolution marks a significant departure from the past, indicating a heightened security orientation. India must now respond not only to prevailing maritime security threats but also act as a strategic stability companion, given the evolving power dynamics in the Indian Ocean region. The semantics of the transition from "Look" to "Act," in a way, hint at a shift from just observing to actively participating on various fronts with policy coming out as an all-inclusive foreign policy tool for India that aims to position the country better in international geopolitics, fetch economic growth and ensure regional security (Mohapatra & Tripathi, 2021, pp. 161–178).

Counterbalancing Regional Dynamics and Forging Partnerships

The growing Chinese military and economic presence in the Indian Ocean Region most starkly illustrates this. Moreover, the increasing Chinese aggression on various fronts, from their docile "String of Pearls" policy to maritime muscle flexing, has also compelled India to develop its maritime capabilities and join hands with like-minded democracies in this march towards a Free & Open Indo-Pacific.

India believes it can use its historical and geographical facts to help lead a regional defence structure under which the Dhruva War is being conducted. The newfound enthusiasm has also impacted BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), and it is now considered one of the key forums for promoting regional cooperation and connectivity. India would like to rearm these pursuits, as well as others, because it is attempting to form a larger regional constellation, particularly in light of China's growing prominence (Kumar, 2020). This forward-leaning engagement aims to avoid unpleasant surprises and prepare for India's role as a net security provider.

A Cooperative Strategy to Support a Free and Open Indo-Pacific

India's being anchor of Indo-pacific as 'net security contributor' with other emerging nations, forms an important part in India's narrative of 'Free, Open and Inclusive Indo-pacific', Given this context, it is not surprising that the US and India however uneven their collaborative agenda has been share a concern over how far China's power index (military, financial authority, and political) has increased dramatically in recent years compared to years with all attendant gloom-and-doom prospects of balkanizing regional power balance including India. This is reflected in India's role in minilateral frameworks, such as the Quad, and bilateral partnerships with countries like France. These are not merely military allies, but also proponents of Chinese competition, even as they fund infrastructure development, rally in support of the rules-based international system, and otherwise uphold the global order. Through these actions, India can secure its claims of strategic autonomy and embolden a broader coalition to serve its national interests in a multipolar world.

Multilateralism as a Strategic Response: The Quad and Beyond

The dynamic environment of the Indo-Pacific, with its multiple forces at play, exogenous factors, and rapidly shifting political constraints both within countries and between them, is compelling a rethinking of India's traditional policy red lines, leading to a strategic shift from non-alignment to "minilateralism." This, of course, is a small quantity of subterfuge concealing support for the development of smaller, more flexible regional security groups, a wise move under the circumstances revealed by the new geopolitical power play in Asia. India has demonstrated the most transparent sign of such a recalibration in its concerted

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effort to revive the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the US, Japan, and Australia. This has materialised in different forms, including the discourse of a free and open Indo-Pacific, which has intersected well with the reincarnation of the Quad in the public imagination after several decades (Hall & Ganguly, 2021, pp. 1-8).

This alignment is primarily dictated by a common, immediate interest in restraining the growing Chinese geopolitical and economic footprint. China is pursuing its "String of Pearls" strategy in the Indian Ocean, an initiative focused on building a series of naval and commercial facilities throughout the ocean that will strengthen China's maritime capabilities and secure its trade routes. Thereby, the Quad nations have broadened and deepened their security cooperation through defence measures, such as joint naval exercises, like La Pérouse, which help develop interoperability and a collective maritime response against conventional and unconventional threats (Wang, 2022, pp. 689-696). Finally, a deeper look into these partnerships as they constitute more than just military cooperation, but an actual response to the evolving defence and security environment, wherein offers to counterbalance Chinese influence within agreements such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), alternatives in infrastructure construction from the Indian QUAD would fit within universal principles of good governance under greater Australian-Indo Pacific parameters.

More importantly, the new trend of other minilateral arrangements, such as AUKUS, which stands for the Australia, UK, and US pact, symbolises a larger geo-strategic drift. In September 2021, both the USA and UK strengthened their security relations with this latter power in a more overt balancing move aimed at China′s echoing military modernisation and regional confidence (Korolev, 2023, pp. 548–568).

AUKUS, while not a traditional security alliance, underpins an emerging trend among like-minded nations that are banding together to strengthen their collective security situation. The nuclear-powered submarine technology that was provided under the pact reflects part of a considerable measure aimed at sharpening defence capabilities and also constitutes an expensive signal (a statement) of capability with intentions to project power and sustain a desired power equilibrium in what is shaping up to be an increasingly geopolitically contested region. These strategic tweaks are all evidence that the complex pas de deux of cooperation within competition will be the defining feature of the Indo-Pacific.

Impact on South Asian Politics

This Indo-Pacific strategic template, which envelops a large ocean expanse, is fundamentally recasting the geopolitical alignments alongside shaping the security and economic trajectories of South Asian countries (Kumar et al., 2020, pp. 215-230). As the venue of geopolitical rivalry between world powers, the region now represents the highest grade in global political discourse as an Indo-Pacific construct spanning the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean regions.

This model demands that we recognise the Indian Ocean as a critical nodal point for global power plays in which rising powers will increasingly shape new geostrategic constructs and advance their national objectives. The realignment of power centres from the European heartland to Asia, where the Indo-Pacific has gained centrality as a critical locus for geostrategic and geo-economic contestation, has buttressed the enhanced relevance of regionalism among both regional and extra-regional players. This exacerbated the great power struggle for influence among China, America, and India, which would have had severe consequences for regional stability and the foreign policies of South Asian states (Hayat et al., 2020, pp. 65–74).

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Modern international relations are also incompletely described in the absence of an analysis of their interconnectedness, which is more broadly taking place through each country's Indo-Pacific strategies, and what differs from our political processes regarding them all. These strategies are primarily driven by the prospect of checking China's rise and its aspirations in its maritime domain, which have prompted states such as India, the US, Japan, and now Australia to recalibrate their policies (Baitha & Chatterjee, 2022, pp. 21-41). The reciprocal strengths and weaknesses of India's so-called "Necklace of Diamonds" counterbalancing approach vis-à-vis China's "String of Pearls" strategy best capture this strategic reconfiguration, driven by increasing geostrategic competition in the Indian Ocean. This strategic setting has, in turn, revived traditional security concerns and fostered an appetite for plural orders of diplomacy and security cooperation among various states, whether aligned or not.

The Indo-Pacific strategy aims to maintain a liberal and free order across the region; however, on a more nuanced level, it appears to be changing existing power structures, as seen in the SAARC region, leaving South Asia weighing strategic autonomy against economic benefits. This intensified competition, though, has resulted in power shifts not seen since 1945-89, with the US still primus inter pares, maintaining this position through its bases and alignments of regional states, such as India, to counter an increasingly assertive China. It also led to not-quite-alliances against China, rather than emerging organically from their environment. Another bloc was the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which the United States leads, while Australia, India, and Japan joined this alliance (Kliem, 2020, pp. 271-304).

The Quad is also expanding links with the military. The Indonesian-Pacific strategic construct, too, encompasses the Chinese spheres of influence, which have expanded their reach to South Asia through initiatives like the BRI and its growing association with neighbouring countries, such as Nepal. This is a development opportunity in the purest sense of the term, even in terms of interpretation. However, it is also an exercise in strategic leverage and debt sustainability, as China's economic footprint expands with each major initiative, such as CPEC.

Kukreja (2020) is also firm on the change in foreign policy that India has undergone in the post-PM Modi era. He describes it as a shift from non-alignment to proactive multi-alignment, creating room in regional and global affairs for the Foreign Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, who even writes articles about it, reinforcing his view that economic crusade is the quintessential praxis of nation-states and building external spaces that he can utilise for advancing domesticity.

The shadow of its historical trade policies and approaches continues to inform how India acts in global trade frameworks. Hence, the perceived tale of a more rigid diplomatic posture and more protectionism in trade must be de-linked to assess where this power play would leave India in terms of its global importance within the broader Indo-Pacific Region. Moreover, it would deliver this verified shade of grey in a predominantly Indian way to address the uncertainties of the Indo-Pacific on its own terms, while also seeking global ascendancy. The strategic calculus of Indian involvement in the Indo-Pacific involves navigating a mix of commitments to multi-alignment rooted in its long-held non-aligned traditions, and changing realities of power projection across the region (Hall & Ganguly, 2021, pp. 1–8).

Future Prospects and Recommendations

The Indo-Pacific's strategic future is poised for continued dynamism, with South Asia at its core. The trajectory of this region will largely depend on how South Asian nations, particularly India, manage the evolving geopolitical competition between major powers. A primary prospect is the continued rise of

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multilateral and bilateral partnerships as a key mechanism for managing security and economic challenges. These arrangements, exemplified by the Quad, are likely to become more formalised and expand their scope to include non-traditional security issues such as climate change, cybersecurity, and pandemic response. It points to a shift from traditional, large-scale multilateral institutions, which may be too slow and clumsy to respond to the fast pace of modern geopolitical change.

The primary recommendation for South Asian states is to navigate this environment strategically by reconstructing their foreign and trade policies. Strategic autonomy is an important goal, but a conservative trade policy, such as that seen in India, for example, might not be the best strategy for economic growth and forming robust, cooperative relationships. Hence, revisiting trade policies with a cautious step-by-step liberalisation approach in mind might be imperative. This would ensure that countries could both defend their industries and leverage economic partnerships to enhance their influence in global politics.

Moreover, South Asian countries need to place a greater emphasis on regional cooperation. Strengthening regional bodies, such as BIMSTEC, would enable nations to form a stronger and more self-reliant economic and security structure. This pooled effort would work as a formidable counterweight to external pressures and ensure regional order. Lastly, it is necessary to conduct more in-depth academic research so that Indian trade policies can be comparatively analysed in quantitative terms and the country may have a future for higher evidence-based policymaking.

Conclusion

The study of the Indo-Pacific policy's role in South Asian politics reveals a complex regional political environment that is becoming increasingly dynamic. This paper has shown how, rather than being a passive theatre, the region is actively reorienting itself and negotiating the fluid power dynamics at work from key global actors such as the USA, China, and India. The Indo-Pacific framework alters existing alignments, prompting regional states to forge new constellations of power at a time when the vision it promotes is of a "free and open" order. South Asian states are faced with difficult decisions regarding both strategic autonomy and economic trajectories. A leading feature of the review is India's proactive turn to multi-alignment, a realistic approach to adapting its national interest-security-interest, economy-interest worldview amid great power competition. Complicating this is a long-standing contradiction between India's geopolitical aspirations and its trade policy, which at times has leaned more towards the cautious and often protectionist side. A shift towards rapid partnerships, such as the Quad, and a return to regional bodies like BIMSTEC indicate a strategic realignment. Ultimately, the fate of South Asia is tied to striking the right balance, as well as reconciling internal economic defensiveness with external geopolitical assertiveness.

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